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AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

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SUBJECT: SERBIA: BELGRADE MAYOR DJILAS REFLECTS ON FIRST YEAR IN  
OFFICE, SERBIA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

REF: A) BELGRADE 363; B) BELGRADE 511

CLASSIFIED BY: Deborah Mennuti, Chief of Political Section, State,  
POL; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

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[1](#)1. (SBU) In an August 13 meeting with the Charge, Belgrade Mayor Dragan Djilas discussed his first year in office, his views on Serbia's relations with Russia and the upcoming visit of Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev, his opinion of local elections in the Belgrade municipality of Vozdovac, as well as his take on the upcoming Gay Pride parade in Belgrade in September. End Summary.

Thoughts on First Year in Office

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[1](#)2. (SBU) Mayor Djilas stated that the city was currently challenged by a reduction in the budget from 800 million Euros to around 500 million Euros due to loss of funds from the national government and reduced revenues from property taxes and land sales. He said he was pleased with the Universiade and the exposure that these games provided for Belgrade, despite the fact that the city saw no financial gain from hosting them.

Relations with Russia

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[1](#)3. (C) Asked for his thoughts on the planned October visit of Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev to Belgrade, Djilas said that he was trying to minimize his role in the preparations due to his negative view of the overall relationship and his frosty relations

with the Russian Ambassador to Serbia. He expressed disgust at recent public appearances of Ambassador Konuzin with Sinisa Vucinic, whom he called a criminal with ties to elements of organized crime. (Vucinic, the head of the Serbian-Russian Friendship Association and a known associate of Hague indictee Arkan, was recently detained for threatening a local journalist.)

13. (C) Djilas also stated that, despite the efforts of many in Moscow and Belgrade to portray the bilateral relationship as one of "brotherly love," this was not the case. Djilas denied that Tadic and the Democratic Party were pushing for closer ties between Serbia and Russia, claiming that President Tadic shared his own discomfort with what he termed the "humiliating" optics and hype surrounding the build up to Medvedev's October visit. He said that President Tadic would be able to control the agenda of the visit in Serbia's favor.

14. (C) Reiterating a stance he shared with the Ambassador in April (Ref A), Djilas told the Charge that he did not favor a Russian built/financed metro for Belgrade, preferring instead to hold a public tender for a light rail system. Such a system would be cheaper, more flexible, and more compatible with the high water table in New Belgrade, he said. Djilas confided that his views on the topic had recently gotten him into hot water with DS leadership. When word reached presidential advisor Miki Rakic that Djilas had stated during a June lunch hosted by the French Ambassador that the Russians were not qualified to build a subway system as they hadn't done so in over 30 years, Rakic instructed him to tone down his comments about the Russians.

#### Chicago Visit

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15. (SBU) The Charge asked the Mayor if he had plans to reschedule the visit Chicago (Belgrade's sister city) postponed in April, offering help with arrangements and stressing its benefits for Belgrade. Djilas said that he would like to visit Chicago soon after the Medvedev visit, at a time convenient to Mayor Daley. He asked for our help identifying workable dates and also determining whether Mayor Daley would consider visiting Belgrade during a September visit to Europe related to Chicago's bid to host the 2016 Olympics. Djilas mentioned that he also hoped to establish contacts between the two cities on the departmental working level, by sending groups of experts from Belgrade to Chicago for a week at a time to look at issues such as zoning, sanitation, and transportation; he planned to work through the Serbian Consulate and fund the travel from the city budget.

#### Vozdovac Elections

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16. (C) The conversation then shifted to the local elections in the Belgrade district of Vozdovac, where Tomislav Nikolic's Progressive Party (SNS) won a plurality in June 7 elections (Ref B). The Charge commented that many had criticized DS for not campaigning as vigorously as the Radicals and the Progressives. The Mayor conceded defensively that this was true because he had to run the city while the opposition had nothing to do but campaign, but that DS would campaign much more vigorously in the repeat elections that would be called in November or December. The Mayor also stated that he was disappointed to see that the United States and the Europeans did not press the SNS to speak publicly about difficult issues such as The Hague Tribunal, arresting Mladic, or Kosovo. Although he saw the splintering of the Radicals as a positive

development, Djilas expressed concern that their being in opposition with no accountability would give them a certain advantage over ruling parties. He predicted that the SNS would do well in the next national election as a result, possibly entering government.

#### Property Issues

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¶17. (SBU) The Charge updated Djilas on preparations for the New Embassy Compound (NEC), stressing that contractors should start local hiring by January 2010. Djilas also promised to help as much as possible with a rezoning petition from the International School of Belgrade.

#### Gay Pride Parade in Belgrade

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¶18. (SBU) The Charge asked Mayor Djilas about plans to ensure security for the Belgrade Gay Pride parade planned for September. The Mayor said that he was confident that the Ministry of Interior would provide good security during the event itself, but expressed concern that hooligans from groups such as 1389 or Obraz could attack participants at other times; without preemptively arresting all members of nationalist groups, Djilas said, it would be impossible to guarantee complete security for Pride participants. Djilas complained that when he had expressed these concerns during an early August press conference, he had been criticized as being against gay rights.

#### Comment

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¶19. (C) Djilas is a politician who is not afraid to express a strong opinion. His frank discussion of Serbia-Russia relations and his views on the Gay Pride parade and Vozdovac elections underscore this fact. He seems dedicated to pushing through his agenda in Belgrade even if it at times rankles others in government and the Democratic Party. End Comment  
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